

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH ADMIRAL THAD ALLEN, COMMANDANT,  
U.S. COAST GUARD VIA TELECONFERENCE SUBJECT: NEW SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT  
INITIATIVES TIME: 11:00 A.M. EDT DATE: MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2008

-----  
Copyright (c) 2008 by Federal News Service, Inc., Ste. 500 1000 Vermont Avenue,  
NW, Washington, DC 20005, USA. Federal News Service is a private firm not  
affiliated with the federal government. No portion of this transcript may be  
copied, sold or retransmitted without the written authority of Federal News  
Service, Inc. Copyright is not claimed as to any part of the original work  
prepared by a United States government officer or employee as a part of that  
person's official duties. For information on subscribing to the FNS Internet  
Service, please visit <http://www.fednews.com> or call (202)347-1400  
-----

(Note: Please refer to [www.dod.mil](http://www.dod.mil) for more information.)

ADM. ALLEN: (In progress) -- to engaging in social media as we move  
forward that will require some careful thought about how we want to integrate  
this together with the current communication systems and record systems we have  
in the Coast Guard and ensure we're meeting our responsibilities imposed on us  
by law, policy and regulation regarding the security of our continental domain.

That said, we can't fail to go forward; otherwise, we're not going to  
be meeting our commitment to the taxpayers we serve and also not meeting my  
personal commitment to be as transparent as we can in the Coast Guard, not only  
within our workforce but to the public we serve.

And to that end, I'd be glad to answer any questions you have for me  
today. (Sustained pause.)

Q Hello, this is Eagle One joining in.

Q Hello?

Q Hello?

LIEUTENANT JENNIFER CRAGG, (Office of the Secretary of Defense for  
Public Affairs): Yes, I'm sorry. A bunch of folks had called in during when  
the admiral was speaking. Can you please give me your names?

Q Eagle One from EagleSpeak.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. You'll be number six.

The next person?

Q Petty Officer Adam Eggers, Pentagon Channel News.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, thank you. You'll be number seven.

Next person? Anybody else?

Okay, with that, let's go ahead and get started with Jim, and then  
we'll go with Amy next. Please go ahead with your questions.

Q Good morning, Admiral. This is Jim Dybo (ph) with The Unofficial Test Drive Blog. What role do you see the new social media having in preserving, analyzing and interpreting test drive history for both the Coast Guard and the American people?

ADM. ALLEN: Well, Jim, I think it's got great, great application to make visible to a lot of people who don't have access to Coast Guard history the very rich and cultural traditions of the Coast Guard. I'm a lifelong member of the Foundation for Coast Guard History. And I myself feel that there probably is not enough appreciation for our history nor ways for people to reach out and get it. And we need probably nontraditional ways to expose them to that. I think social media can provide a great way to do that.

We have our traditional sites on the .mil domain. I think ultimately we're going to have to go across the air gap and figure out a way to get more information out there with wider access to the American public. And we're actively talking about how we can shift a lot of our content from .mil to .com, and I think that is a way forward.

Q Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, Amy, next, please. Q Hi, Admiral. I have heard that part of this initiative, there will be like a Facebook-type application specific to the Coast Guard. Is that correct? Or are you talking about utilizing actual Facebook?

ADM. ALLEN: Well, I'm not sure we're going to be constrained to any particular platform application or media. The issue is to try and get the broadest representation of the Coast Guard to the widest audience as possible. And to that extent, we will be standing up what I would call a semi-official Facebook site for me to be able to communicate and make available content to the folks that are working online.

To that end, I have been working a personal Facebook account for a couple of months just to experiment myself with the dynamics associated with dealing with the Facebook community. It's been a very rich and rewarding experience for me. But we need to somehow institutionalize that to make sure we have equal access for everybody that needs that information. And we need to move beyond a Facebook account that's based on my own personal ability to sustain it to a more Coast Guard wide presentation. So there will be Facebook presence shortly.

We're also looking at moving to a Commandant's Corner 2.0, who will make information about me, what the Coast Guard's doing and my interactions more accessible to everybody else. A work in progress with substantial changes coming in the next few weeks.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, Amy.

Let's go to Peter.

Q Admiral Allen, good morning. This is Peter Stinson with An Unofficial Coast Guard Blog. My first question is one you're likely expecting if you visited our site in the last couple of hours. I was wondering if you could comment on the denial for the fee waivers for our recent FOIA request and specifically how that denial meshes with your hopes for engaging new media and

social media external to the Coast Guard, and also how it squares with your desires for transparency from and within the Coast Guard?

ADM. ALLEN: Happy to do that, Peter. First of all, nothing we've done is inconsistent with where I want to take the Coast Guard. We want to be transparent. We want to release information. We do have constraints that are placed on us by the current laws that govern FOIA requests. And frankly, there are certain standards that have been laid out in the statutes that we apply to these requests.

Regard media fee waivers, there is a set of criterion out there on what constitutes journalistic activity. We've taken a long look at the standards that are out there, looking at the code of ethics and standards from the American Society of News Editors, Associated Press standards and the Society of Professional Journalists code of conduct. If you look at the statutes regarding FOIA requests, it talks about editorial skill to convert raw material into a distinct work.

And we've raised two points in regard to the FOIA request at hand. A very broad FOIA request that says anything that has a certain title or some type of a definition attached to it, we want to see what's in your records, so it's kind of hard to kind of narrow that down to what it is actually talking about. We deal with FOIA requests for Deepwater on specific issues on a daily basis that are completely transparent and open in regards to that.

The second one is, what is a blog in relation to what a standard journalistic organization is that takes editorial skill to convert raw material into distinct work? And in your request for your FOIA, you indicate that you're seeking this on behalf of your blog site for dissemination to the general public with no intent to use editorial skill to convert the raw material into a distinct work. And those standards were applied.

Q Thank you, sir.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, before we go on to David, if possible, anybody else on the line if you can put your phones on "mute" when Admiral Allen is speaking. I'm picking up other people's conversations.

So with that, let's go to David.

Q Admiral, hi. This is David Axe with Wired's Danger Room blog. So to follow up on Peter's question, it sounds then like you're saying that Unofficial Coast Guard Blog does not, by your standards, meet the criteria for a legitimate journalistic outlet. I just want to clarify, is that true?

ADM. ALLEN: It has nothing to do with my standards. It has to do with the established standards in the statutes what the journalistic business community out there uses and the statement on the blog that that is not their intent and that's not the purpose of the blog.

Q Well, sir, what about Wired's Danger Room? Does that count as a journalistic enterprise?

ADM. ALLEN: We have no requests from you on a FOIA request. We'd be glad to act on it if one was submitted.

Q Well, but before I go ahead and do that, I mean, do you think Danger Room counts as journalism?

ADM. ALLEN: Well, it's pretty speculative. You'd have to give me the particular case in point and it would have to be measured against what we talked about earlier, what is addressed in the statutes. And again, let me repeat. The American Society of News Editors, Associated Press standards and Society of Professional Journalists codes of ethics, those are kind of the touchstones we use because, quite frankly, you take a look at the case law and the statutes that are out there right now, they are not addressing social media. There have been amendments made to the FOIA statutes in 2007. It will actually go into effect in 2009. But they are silent on social media and focus on traditional and news media.

One of the problems and challenges we have right now is trying to interpret this in the absence of official policy or statutory guidance on this. And in that vacuum, we are applying journalistic standards that are used in industry out there. So those are the standards we would apply, David. Q Well, sir, actually, but there really isn't a vacuum. You might perceive on, but blogs written by journalists and, you know, blogs that perform this process of gathering raw material and processing it and disseminating it to the public, I mean, those are very widely, all over the world, considered journalistic enterprises. It seems strange that the Coast Guard would have this stated interest in engaging in a, quote-unquote, "social media" and getting online and being more transparent while also hiding behind what sounds like a lot of legalese that enables the Coast Guard to redefine news blogs as something else in order to avoid engaging in them. This seems like a direct contradiction here.

ADM. ALLEN: Well, I wouldn't use the term "hiding." I wouldn't say that. There's another issue here, and that's the totality of the impact of these requests on us. If every person in the United States that had an interest submitted a FOIA request, we would stop doing the work of the Coast Guard. There's a significant issue here about the opportunity and cost associated with these activities without a good cause as it relates to the taxpayer's dollar and our responsibility to make sure that we're taking care of our stakeholders there.

It's not my intention nor will it ever be in the future to hide behind anything. It's my intention to apply legal standards and policy standards inside the Coast Guard and treat everybody equitably, and that's what we will do moving forward with the social media.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. Let's go ahead and get some other bloggers and journals a chance to ask Admiral Allen some questions. Let's go with Darren, and after Darren it's going to be Eagle One.

Darren.

Q Good morning, Admiral. Darren Lewis with Unofficial Coast Guard Blog. In the brief on this call, you mentioned that you want to move from a vertical information management structure to a more network organization. How do we mediate between a networked information management structure and a vertical leadership and command structure?

ADM. ALLEN: That is a terrific question, and that's one of the -- (inaudible) -- issues that Coast Guard leadership is dealing with today.

If you look at the recent coordination in our response to Hurricane Ike, I knew from my own experience as the principal federal official in Hurricane Katrina that we can only be effective to the extent that we empower our leaders on scene and make what they are doing visible to senior leaders without endless routing of information through echelons.

To that extent, we empowered Admiral Papp as the Atlantic Area commander to coordinate directly as the lead operational responder. And to the extent that he needed resources from Pacific Area, they actually coordinated that between themselves without any Coast Guard headquarters intervention, which is probably a first for a major operation.

That said, what they are doing has to be visible to us and using things like chat rooms among senior leaders at the same time we're using conference calls to using all the modern IT tools we have within the Coast Guard suite to simultaneously make all senior leaders aware of the situation and the operational picture down there is what we've got to do. And we should endlessly restless and curious about new ways to do that and flatten the organization.

We need operations conducted outside Coast Guard headquarters who need to have those operations visible to the chain of command, not only to me but up to Secretary Chertoff.

Q Thank you, sir.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. Eagle One, please.

Q Yes, Admiral, good morning. I have a couple of questions which follow along that line. One is that the -- (inaudible) -- structure for communications seems to me to be perfectly suitable for dissemination of information to merchant ships and other users of your services. Is that part of the plan here, too, is to expand the use of getting rampant information out to your endusers?

ADM. ALLEN: I believe I understood the question, but a couple of your words were blocked out at the beginning. Could you restate it, please?

Q Yeah. It had to do with the use of the systems we've been talking about, the infrastructure we've been talking about to get the word out to merchant ships who are endusers of your services. Is part of the plan to make sure that there's a rapid capability or a rapid dissemination of information to your ship owner and merchant users?

ADM. ALLEN: I think it is, and there are a lot of issues associated with that, as you probably are well aware. Making information available online and actually pushing that information out is what we want to do. You know, we have a very successful Homeport system which is a portal we use for dealing with industry. As we look at the challenges coming ahead regarding the type of information that has to move in the maritime transportation system, including issues like automated identification systems and long-range tracking, environmental issues that come from NOAA systems just like ports give you environmental conditions as you're transiting in and out of port is something we need to look at.

We need to work with the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration in moving this forward. Sooner or later, this information ought

to become as ubiquitous as weather broadcasts, ought to be able to be pushed out so everybody has the same view of the maritime domain. I agree completely.

Q Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. Let's go with Public Affairs Specialist First Class Eggers.

Q Good morning, Admiral. It's PA1 Adam Eggers with Pentagon Channel News. With the spectrum of social media and showing Coast Guard missions to the public, the Coast Guard is currently the only military service that does not produce podcasts and vodcasts available on iTunes. Has there been any conversations about the Coast Guard becoming involved in this media?

ADM. ALLEN: We're not rejecting any media and the ability to get out information. We only have to jump from .mil to .com, and sometimes that has to be air gapped, and these are the best way to do it. We are looking at everything. We are involving YouTube. We are involving Flickr. And in my view, any time we can get the message out, whether it's visual, audio or video, we need to be doing that. And we're willing to consider anything.

Q Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Now, did anybody else join us during any of the other bloggers or online journalists asking question?

Q Yeah, I did. I'm Marc Danziger from Winds of Change.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. Anybody else?

Okay, Marc, please go with your questions and I'll turn it over to the rest of the bloggers for any follow-up questions.

Q Okay. My first question is sort of, as you try and talk about transitioning -- and I apologize because I was a minute or two late -- are you talking about moving the Coast Guard to sort of one common, social media platform? Or are you talking about, in essence, a cloud of tools?

ADM. ALLEN: The answer is probably e, all of the above. I think you need to use a variety of tools that are out there. First of all, I think we have to have an air gap between the .mil and .com domains. There's so much stuff that goes on inside the .mil domain where we have to have security concerns. And a lot of it which it can't even be discussed at this level. And a lot of that plays into the decisions we're making about what can be done within the .mil domain and what can't be.

There are also issues about bandwidth and the cost of doing all of this. If you take a look at how many people are on .mil domains that are involved in a .com site at any time during the day dealing with our bandwidth that we're purchasing right now goes towards that connectivity. I'd like to see us move into the .com domain wherever we can and push that content over there.

That said, you shouldn't rule out anything because you don't know what the next big application is. Right now, I intend to work on Facebook. But you know, I'm not saying I shouldn't be in Second Life at some point. I'm not sure we're ready to get there now. And whether or not you're dealing with a specific

platform or a cloud, I think you should figure out the effect you're trying to achieve, and it should match that.

That said, whatever we're dealing with that's going to be out there in public domain has to be information that's truly releasable to the public and is consistent with our security policies. And that's where we intend to go.

Q Let me clarify, if I can, just because I'm not as concerned with the efforts to link the Coast Guard with the public and create outward transparency, although that's an issue. In my day job, I deal with organizational change around, you know, implementing these tools within organizations. And while I understand there's limits on what you can talk about, are you guys talking about moving to one sort of internal .mil platform? Or is that going to be a cloud as well?

ADM. ALLEN: We're already there. We're at a single domain inside the Coast Guard. If you get inside the Coast Guard's data network, you're dealing with USCG.mil and that's it. So we've already unified our internal data network and our point of presence inside the Coast Guard. We're there. The question is building the functionality in terms of the equivalence of internal Facebook, internal chat rooms, internal content and where you post that and how you do that and how we do the Web pages inside the .mil domain. But as far as a single domain, we are there.

Q Okay.

LT. CRAGG: Does anyone have any follow-up questions?

Q Yes. This is David Axe again with Wired's Danger Room. Admiral, I'm still sort of befuddled by the apparent contradiction between this desire to engage social media but then the reluctance, when challenged and when given an opportunity to engage, that is this FOIA request, the Coast Guard's reluctance to do so. I actually would like to ask why you're bothering speaking to a bunch of bloggers today if we're not media?

ADM. ALLEN: I'm speaking to a bunch of bloggers today because it is a way to communicate and use social media. There's a difference between communications, journalism, print reporting and so forth. And what we're talking about is how we have content inside the Coast Guard and how we deal with that and how we make that accessible to the public based on the statutes that are out there and the rules that apply.

The documents are available. The question is at what cost and what price, what value to be derived from the public for them versus the effort it takes to answer a broad-based question that is not focused and not dealing with a direct subject.

Q Well, sir, but in light of the heat that this issue is generating in the very online community that the Coast Guard apparently hopes to engage, you know, via the social media, in light of the heat that this issue is generating, this FOIA request and Deepwater and the C4ISR, doesn't it seem like actually a good investment of, you know, some Coast Guard cash to get this information out and to put out these fires and to prove that the Coast Guard is serious about transparency?

ADM. ALLEN: First of all, I'm no stranger to heat. And if heat was a criteria to this whole thing, the information would be available. It's a much

larger issue than that. Anybody that knows me knows where I stand personally on this thing. I'm transparent, and we're going to make it as transparent as we can. There are limits to what you can do, as a governmental organization, based on the laws and the policies that are out there. Also, we need to have a focused conversation about what the problem is, not an entire set of records related to one key word search that results in such a volume that it would distract our workforce. And I'm not sure it's the greatest payback to the taxpayer. I know you're representing a community, but that community has to be compared with all the other communities we serve.

LT. CRAGG: Does anyone have any other follow-up questions before Admiral Allen closes with his closing statement?

Q Yes, Lieutenant, this is Peter Stinson. I've actually got a couple, if I may. First one, sir, many senior leaders are very scared about these social media, new media tools and will do whatever it takes to stamp out their use. How is the Coast Guard going to ensure a move to using social media tools internally, which seem to support the real purpose of the modernization initiative?

ADM. ALLEN: Well, first of all, you gotta walk the talk, Peter. And despite any reservations you may have about whether or not I'm transparent or not, we're managing real-time operations by real-time chat rooms and using other ways to spread information around. I think the commitment is clear on my part. You don't turn a tanker around on a dime, nor do you change organizations instantaneously. We know the Coast Guard modernization is a multi-year task. Teaching senior leaders in an organization that have been raised up for 25 or 30 years to relearn how to learn and acquire new tools is a challenge that I've taken on as a leader, and I'm doing that.

I have to balance things, like security, workload, access, communications, at the same time trying to cultivate a set of new leaders and understand this technology and embrace it. I have to do that and, quite frankly, some of this is a value judgment I made and personal decisions I've made based on my interaction and how I need to move forward. That might not always stand against the sanity test from where you sit, but I have to manage the Coast Guard from where I sit.

Q Yes, sir. So it sounds like with regard to senior leaders and getting them onboard, you're teaching them how to fish rather than telling them to fish or giving them fish. Would that be an accurate analogy?

ADM. ALLEN: Peter, there's no small amount of angst in the Coast Guard right now regarding all of this, whether you sit where I'm at and you don't know how far you should try and push the organization and whether it's ready to go or how much risk you're willing to assume versus the gain that's to be made from this. And quite frankly, we've got a lot of people out there that are eating fish, we got a lot of people that are out there fishing. We got a lot of different types of folks, and we've got to figure out how we can move this along. There are a lot of people that understand the technology, embrace it and understand it in their private life but are what I would call Internet introverts publicly because that's not the way they generate communications when they interact with other people. Quite clearly, the blog community, the social interaction that takes place by combining that with IT technology is a new form of social interaction and human behavior. Not everybody operates that way in the world, and we have to make sure we're addressing all the needs of our workforce and our senior leaders in the revolution.



Q Yes, sir. Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Before I give it over to Admiral Allen for his closing statement, did anybody have any last-minute questions?

Q I do. Admiral, this is Amy McCullough at Navy Times. You mentioned changes to infrastructure and challenges that that would put forth. Do you have any idea exactly what kind of infrastructure changes you need and how much that would cost?

ADM. ALLEN: Well, first of all, we have to talk about access. And access is related to how we deal with the .mil domain and the firewalls, what information moves between that, how you ensure information. Most of the time when we deal with the public now, we replicate data that's inside our firewall and we put it in what we call a DMZ or demilitarized zone that can be accessed without getting into the databases. There are issues with remote access that have caused considerable hardships on our auxilarists and our Reservists that don't have access to get into our data network. We have to resolve all of that.

One of those is Web-based access using our common access cards to burrow in safely and get the information they want out of our data networks. We also have to be mindful.

There have been several reports issued recently regarding security issues on our firewall. And we need to make sure we're maintaining the integrity of the .mil domain.

We'll continue to reinvent our portal. And we will continue to do that. (We just need to ?) upgrade the access that folks have from the outside marine transportation community through Homeport and so forth. And we'll continue to do all that.

This is really, in classical IT terms, an enterprise architecture that's always in an as-is and a to-be configuration. We're moving from 1.0 to 1.2 to 2.0 to 2.5. And the challenge and the problem is we shouldn't take the status quo as an acceptable position. In fact, my definition of status quo is an oxymoron. But we need to keep improving where we can, whether it's my presence inside or outside the Coast Guard, how we deal with the American public but, more importantly, how deal with the folks in the Coast Guard.

I think Web access, using a common access card that can be used from any personal computer, is going to be a huge step forward in empowering our auxilarists and our Reservists.

Q Sir, one follow-up question. So a lot of this will be targeting Reservists and auxilarists as well. Is this going to be used as a recruiting tool, too, for the Coast Guard?

ADM. ALLEN: Well, I think our ability to use the social media and interact as a community is indispensable in recruiting. But I would tell you that just by providing better access in computing platforms is not a recruiting tool in and of itself. I think it's a demand on anybody you're hiring. Young kids coming into the Coast Guard today demand parity with what they've been using all their lives and growing up with. And to the extent they enter an organization that's not evolving and upgrading the technology and the access and the social networks that they're used, there's no incentive for them to join.

So I don't think it's a recruiting initiative. I think it's a structure of our IT inside the Coast Guard and how we use social media. We have to do that because that is the environment that we're drawing our new recruits from. LT. CRAGG: Okay, sir, I'd like to at this point turn it over to you. Do you have any final closing statements that you'd like to provide at this time?

ADM. ALLEN: Well, I think it's instructive with the range of questions we had today, anywhere from content to how we relate to our outside stakeholders to the -- (inaudible) -- associated with individual bloggers that are trying to figure out what their identity is and we're trying to figure out what our relationship is with them, our intent in dealing with the blogging community is not to be exclusive. Our intent is to be inclusive.

But in the process of being inclusive, we all need to understand what that means. And in the (All Coasts ?) that will go out later today that kind of lays out where we want to go and the general sense on this, I'm reminding everybody that on Coast Guard Day this year, we published what we called the Coast Guard Ethos. And it talks about understanding what we are in the Coast Guard as guardians -- we protect, we defend, we save. Those are the things that we do.

Obviously, encourage everybody that's involved in blogging within the Coast Guard community, whether you're a civilian, auxilarist, Reservist, active duty, contractor or retiree, to understand that when you're blogging, that's no different than operating in a social environment on a Coast Guard base or anyplace else. We have a duty to the American public, we have a duty to each other to be guardians of each other. And to the extent that we have core values, I think we need to demonstrate that as we operate on a daily basis in the blogosphere.

So thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir.

And today's program will be available on the blogger's link on dod.mil where you'll be able to access a story based on today's call along with the source document such as Admiral Allen's bio, the audio file and then print transcripts.

Again, thank you, sir.

Thank you, Admiral Allen and the blogger participants on this call. This concludes today's event. Feel free to disconnect at any time. Thank you, everyone.

END.